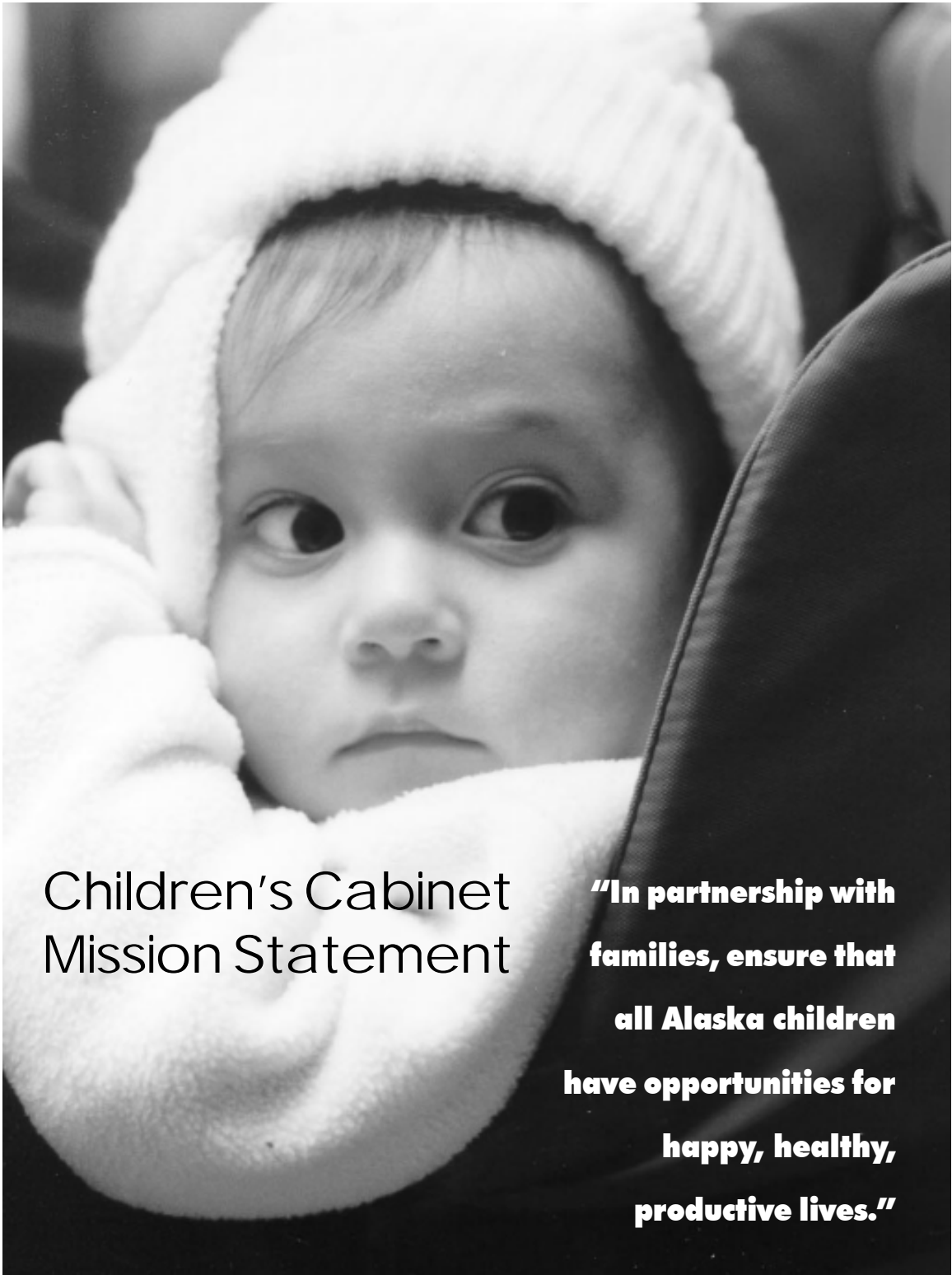




Children's Cabinet Report

Accomplishments and Next Steps
Knowles/Ulmer Administration
December 2001



Children's Cabinet Mission Statement

**"In partnership with
families, ensure that
all Alaska children
have opportunities for
happy, healthy,
productive lives."**

Children's Cabinet Priorities

"To help children at all ages and stages of development, beginning with young children. Results will come through locally driven solutions, collaboration across state departments and with communities, and the promotion of positive parenthood. Success will be defined by the achievement of measurable results."



Top row picture above (l-r), Governor Tony Knowles; current Children's Cabinet members, Governor Fran Ulmer, special advisor; Co-Chair Shirley Holloway, commissioner of Education and Early Development; Co-Chair Margaret Pugh, commissioner of Corrections; Glenn Godfrey, commissioner of Public Safety; bottom row (l-r), Jay Livey, commissioner of Health and Social Services; Attorney General Bruce Botelho; Budget Director Annalee McConnell; Michele Brown, Department of Environmental Conservation; Karen Perdue, vice president, University of Alaska. Past members (not pictured): Ron Otte, former commissioner of Public Safety; Mike Irwin, former commissioner of Community and Regional Affairs; Rick Cross, former commissioner of Education and Early Development.

Brief History of the Children's Cabinet

Alaska's children have been at the top of the Administration's priority list since Gov. Tony Knowles and Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer took office in December 1994. They recognize Alaska has a brighter future if our children grow up safe, healthy, happy and prepared to be good citizens. Early in 1995, Gov. Knowles appointed the Children's Cabinet to make sure children's issues are always considered during top-level policy

discussions. The Children's Cabinet is composed of the lieutenant governor, the attorney general, the state budget director, the commissioners of education and early development, health and social services, corrections, public safety, and the associate vice president for health at the University of Alaska. It is supported by Governor's Office staff and draws expertise from professionals both inside and outside state government.



Major Children’s Cabinet Accomplishments So Far

children’s cabinet /state of the child address raise awareness in alaska

The Children’s Cabinet keeps children at the forefront of Knowles-Ulmer Administration policy matters and helps engage Alaskans in ongoing discussions on how to improve child well-being. The Cabinet spearheads many important initiatives and hosts major conferences and events in Alaska. At the Cabinet’s recommendation, Gov. Knowles delivers an annual State of the Child Address to focus attention on children’s issues. This now anticipated yearly speech has become a catalyst for many important initiatives.

smart start for alaska’s children fights abuse and neglect

Smart Start was launched in 1997 as the Knowles-Ulmer Administration’s flagship initiative to prevent child abuse and neglect. As Gov. Knowles said on state-



wide television when he unveiled Smart Start: “I see a future of change where all of Alaska’s children have adequate health care; where families have the chance to grow strong and prosperous; where Alaskans have zero tolerance for the neglect and abuse of our children.” Today, despite great progress, there’s more work to do. Too many children in Alaska are living their lives in fear. That’s why Smart Start continues to be at the forefront of the Children’s Cabinet’s agenda and will serve as a blueprint for improved child well being in Alaska for years to come.

denali kidcare gives thousands more children access to health care

This Smart Start program is tremendously successful. It has won praise from parents, doctors and the Children’s Defense Fund, which named Denali KidCare top in the nation for the rate at which children were



enrolled for health care services. Since its inception in March 1999, nearly 4,000 pregnant women have signed up for basic health care coverage. And, by late 2001, about 21,500 children had signed up for health insurance coverage through Denali KidCare. In other words, they now are able to see a doctor when sick and, better yet, afford basic preventative care that’s so important to healthy growth and development. Denali KidCare is for hard-working Alaska families who earn too much for Medicaid but not enough to afford their own health insurance.

tougher intervention makes protecting children the first priority

As part of Smart Start , the Knowles-Ulmer Administration and Children’s Cabinet in 1998 successfully championed legislation to keep troubled families intact when possible but also move more swiftly when children are in peril. A legislative audit concluded that Alaska laws were so restrictive they sometimes prohibited social workers from intervening to protect children in high-risk situations. The



law now allows state agencies to get involved earlier, before children are seriously injured or killed. It also narrows the timeframe for parents to resolve serious problems threatening their children’s well-being. The state is nearing its zero-tolerance goal of responding to all reports of harm - we’re at 91 percent statewide (up from 75 percent) and 100 percent in some areas.

alaska children’s trust activated to fund local prevention programs

Created by the Legislature with bipartisan support in 1988, the Trust is designed to help prevent child abuse and neglect in Alaska. The Trust was never funded until the Knowles-Ulmer Administration, the legislature and the Children’s Cabinet made it a priority. In 1996, it received its first—and, to date, only—legislative appropriation of \$6 million. Today, a seven-member Board of Trustees manages the Trust. Through community and business support and fund-raising coordinated by the Friends of the Alaska Children’s Trust, the Trust principal now totals \$9.2 million. Each year, Trust earnings are awarded in grants



to community-initiated programs to prevent child abuse and neglect. Since 1997, 40 Alaska organizations have received over \$1.5 million in grants.

welfare reform, reinvestment of savings help children and families

Welfare reform in Alaska has produced astonishing results. The overall caseload has dropped 43 percent, from more than 13,000 Alaska families receiving assistance at the historic caseload high in 1994, to fewer than 7,500 families receiving assistance today. Since Alaska’s welfare reform law took effect in 1997, the state has cumulatively saved more than \$200 million in reduced payments. At the Children’s Cabinet’s urging and Gov. Knowles’ insistence, much of that savings has been reinvested in child care, job training and other family friendly programs to help Alaskans make a successful and long-lasting transition from welfare to work. For instance, state spending on childcare has increased since the implementation of welfare reform, from \$19 million in 1997 to more than \$33 million today.

“balloon project” finds homes for children stuck too long in foster care

In 1999 the Children’s Cabinet recognized

the need to speed up the system for children lingering in the uncertainty of temporary foster care. Working with lawmakers, the Knowles-Ulmer Administration secured funding for 20 more professionals to help tackle the backlog, including child protection attorneys, social workers, guardians ad litem, and public defenders. It worked. As of today, the “Balloon Project” has helped nearly 1,200 children find permanent homes. Key results of the “Balloon Project” include 414 children adopted, 199 children entered into permanent guardianships, and 354 children reunited successfully with their families. Another 230 children are now free for adoption. Overall adoptions have more than doubled, while the number of children stuck in the system too long has dropped at least 25 percent.

crime rate drops as alaska’s juvenile justice system improves

The Children’s Cabinet convened the Conference on Youth and Justice in November 1995, making juvenile justice a priority. More than 90 Alaska experts met to develop recommendations for a new juvenile justice policy. That policy is based on the premise that solutions must include greater individual and community responsibility for Alaska’s young people. This commitment



must come from state government, but also from citizens and community leaders. For the six-year period between FY95 and FY01, overall juvenile crime in Alaska is down 23 percent and violent juvenile crime is down nearly 16 percent. A new Division of Juvenile Justice has been in operation since July 1999. Youth courts or community panels are now in operation in over 30 Alaska communities holding offenders more accountable through the use of restitution and community service. Since 1995, 97 new juvenile detention and secure treatment beds have been added across the state, meaning young offenders can face consequences and get help closer to home.

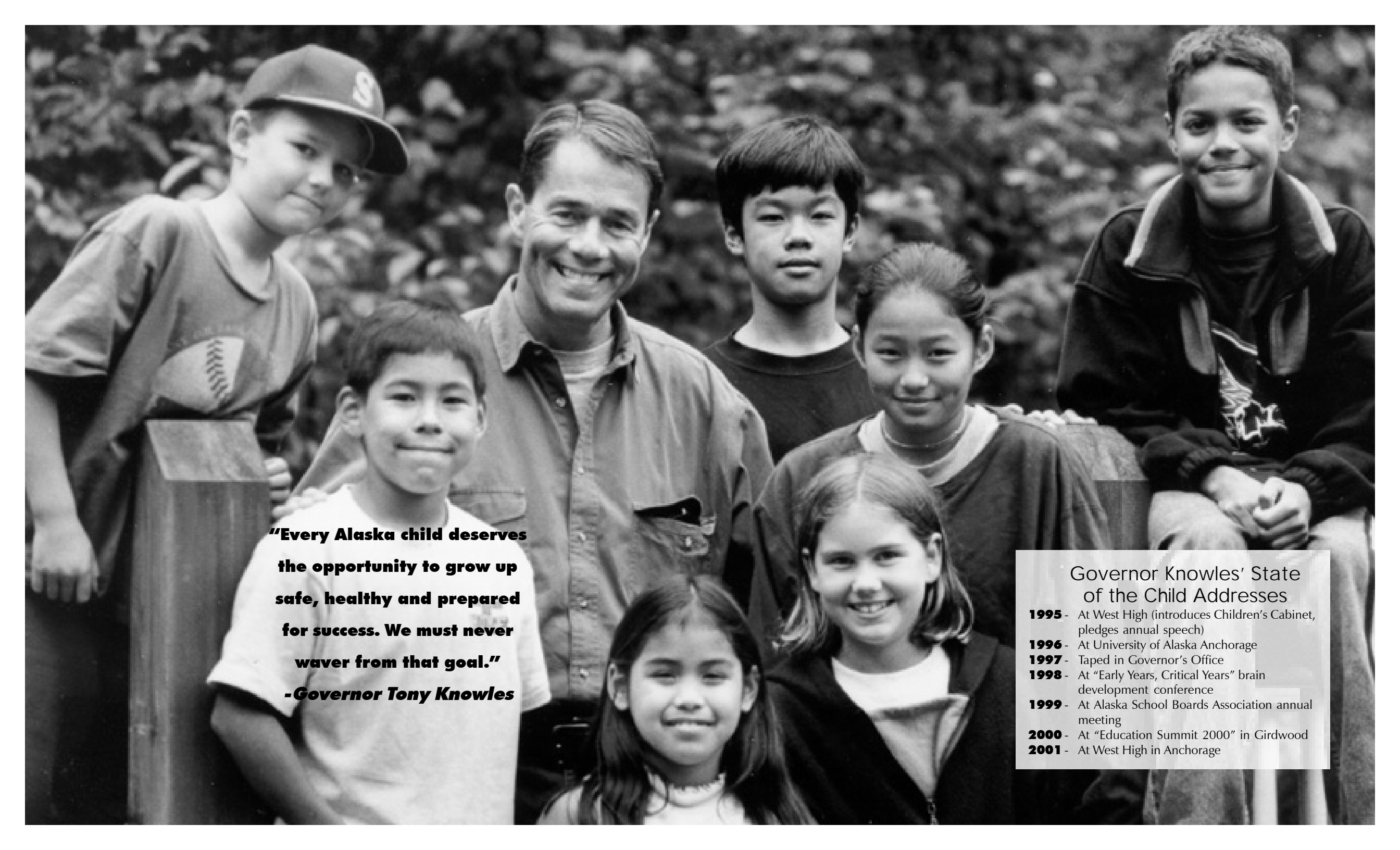
state tobacco tax increases, cigarette consumption declines

In 1997, Governor Knowles signed tobacco tax legislation that increased the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products. Sales of cigarettes have fallen substantially in Alaska since then. During FY99, the first full year of implementation, taxable sales fell by 16 percent. During the first full year of the tax rate increase, per capita taxable consumption decreased by 14.8 percent from previous levels, although the total percentage of adults smoking remains relatively

constant. It appears that smokers may be smoking less frequently, in that adults who smoked every day decreased from 22.3 percent to 19.8 percent, while the percent who smoked some days increased from 4.2 percent to 6.3 percent. Smoking rates among high school students decreased between 1995 and 1999, with 37.1 percent reporting to be current smokers in 1995 compared to 33.9 percent in 1999. More dramatic decreases in tobacco use may have occurred among younger students, although Anchorage’s decision not to participate in the 1999 Youth Behavior Risk Survey prevents generalization to the state’s middle school population.

school excellence is goal of quality schools initiative, added resources

Alaska’s landmark Quality Schools Initiative (QSI) was spearheaded by Gov. Knowles and adopted by the Legislature in 1998 following years of development in the state education department. Its premise: Although Alaska repeatedly scores average or higher on national achievement tests and the SAT, we must do more to prepare students for a bright future. Two statewide education summits, one in 1996 and another in 2000, cemented support for the QSI from business leaders and parents. The initiative

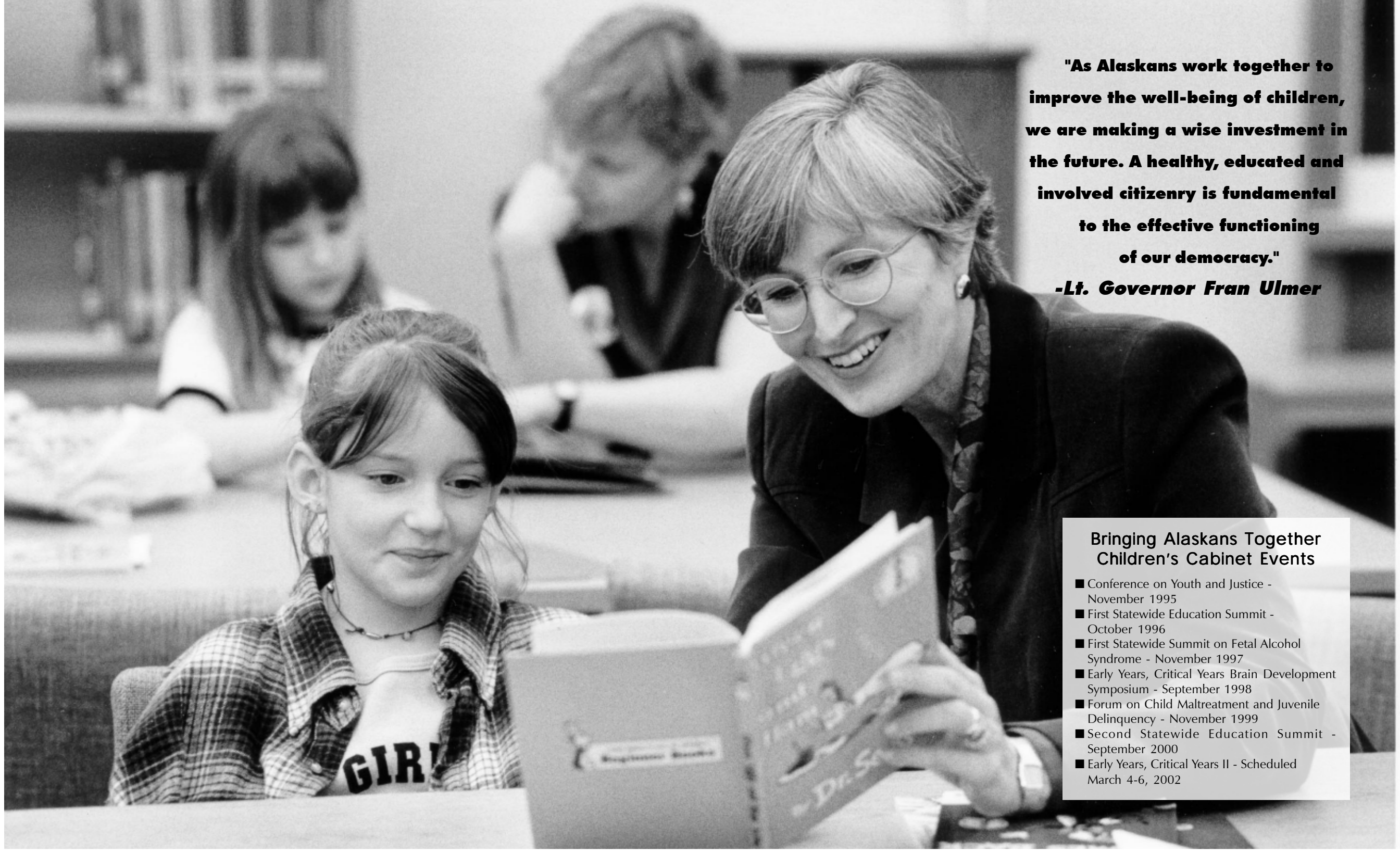


**"Every Alaska child deserves
the opportunity to grow up
safe, healthy and prepared
for success. We must never
waver from that goal."**

-Governor Tony Knowles

Governor Knowles' State of the Child Addresses

- 1995** - At West High (introduces Children's Cabinet, pledges annual speech)
- 1996** - At University of Alaska Anchorage
- 1997** - Taped in Governor's Office
- 1998** - At "Early Years, Critical Years" brain development conference
- 1999** - At Alaska School Boards Association annual meeting
- 2000** - At "Education Summit 2000" in Girdwood
- 2001** - At West High in Anchorage

A black and white photograph of Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer, a woman with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and a patterned scarf. She is smiling and looking down at an open book she is holding. A young girl with dark hair, wearing a plaid shirt over a white t-shirt with the word "GIRL" visible, is sitting next to her, also looking at the book. In the background, another young girl is visible, and bookshelves are filled with books.

**"As Alaskans work together to
improve the well-being of children,
we are making a wise investment in
the future. A healthy, educated and
involved citizenry is fundamental
to the effective functioning
of our democracy."**

-Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer

Bringing Alaskans Together Children's Cabinet Events

- Conference on Youth and Justice - November 1995
- First Statewide Education Summit - October 1996
- First Statewide Summit on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome - November 1997
- Early Years, Critical Years Brain Development Symposium - September 1998
- Forum on Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency - November 1999
- Second Statewide Education Summit - September 2000
- Early Years, Critical Years II - Scheduled March 4-6, 2002



calls for higher standards for students, schools and educators; meaningful testing to chart student progress; and more resources to promote student and school excellence. Progress is occurring. Standards are in place for students, teachers and school administrators; a high school graduation exam and benchmark tests in lower grades are on the books; and a task force of prominent Alaskans appointed by the Governor is leading the charge for more classroom resources—\$14 million in new state revenue was added in 2001, along with a total of \$26 million in 1998 and 1999. As for facilities, the administration proposed several plans to address the entire backlog of projects—40 new or replacement schools and 86 overdue school repair projects. Six new schools were approved by lawmakers in 2000, four more in 2001. Of the 86 repair projects, 10 were OK'd in 2000 and 30 more in 2001.

increasing awareness of children's issues, promoting community involvement

The Children's Cabinet has listened to Alaskans frequently about children's issues—through conferences, work sessions and local meetings. Led by Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer, cabinet members

held town hall meetings around the state and visited local children's programs. These discussions were critical to the realization that, by working together, parents, children's advocates, community providers and local and state government can make a difference. Gov. Knowles continued the dialogue in a series of teleconferenced "roundtables" hosted by mayors across the state. At these meetings, local professionals—from Head Start directors to police chiefs—joined the call for a comprehensive child abuse prevention program. The cabinet also launched the COMPASS program (Community Partnerships for Access, Solutions and Success), which helped create innovative local programs to improve child well-being and prepare kids for success in school.

building blocks: agencies work together on child development/early learning

The Children's Cabinet created an interdepartmental team to identify and work on health and education matters critical for children prenatal through age 8. The group developed a framework titled, "Building Blocks: Continuing the Progress of Smart Start," which articulates a shared vision for Alaska's children to be healthy, safe, and successful at home, at school and in



their communities. The group accomplishes work through priorities including behavioral health, children of incarcerated parents, early childhood health, early care and education.

Next Steps for Alaska's Children

smart start/strong future: health, safety and success for alaska's children

Working with Gov. Knowles and Lt. Gov. Ulmer, the Children's Cabinet has developed the next phase of the Smart Start initiative, which is making dramatic improvements in child well-being in Alaska. Smart Start/Strong Future was unveiled in the Governor's 2001 State of the Child Address and will be considered by the 2002 Alaska Legislature.



what is smart start/strong future?

It has **three important goals:** healthy children, safe children and successful children. It continues a comprehensive plan to **protect children,**



invest in proven prevention programs to **break the cycle** of family violence, and help **children succeed in school**, and in life. Smart Start/Strong Future is also an important **crime fighting tool**. Research tells us abused children are more likely to become perpetrators themselves and that, conversely, children raised in quality early childhood programs are less likely to be criminals as adults. Smart Start/Strong Future requires a few strategic **new investments** in state and community programs, **continued support** for successful programs, and **innovative new laws**.

why we need smart start/strong future

Abuse causes more violence. Abused children are more likely to commit violent crimes when they grow up. **Quality preschools improve school success and reduce crime.** At-risk children enrolled in quality early childhood programs are less likely to be arrested for violent crime. They are more likely to be good students and finish high school. **Preventive health care pays off.** Pregnant women without health insurance are less likely to get prenatal care and thus more likely to have babies with costly outcomes such as low birth weights or alcohol-related birth



defects. **Good child care is good for business.** Parents content with their child care arrangements are more attentive workers and less likely to quit their jobs. **It will save money.** Over the long term, Smart Start/Strong Future will reduce future state costs for crime, health care and welfare.

**highlights of smart start/
strong future proposals**

Child Health

New Investments - \$3.7 million in state funds to expand alcohol treatment for juveniles and women with children, to fight inhalant abuse, to bolster suicide prevention, and to protect children's health by making sure their environment is clean and safe. \$4.1 million more from the tobacco settlement fund to reduce tobacco use, especially among children and teens.

Ongoing Support - Replace lost federal funds for the birth defects registry.

Child Safety

New Investments - \$4.9 million in state funds to add criminal investigators of child abuse, respond to more reports of harm, attract and re-

tain foster parents, help reunite broken families, better supervise juvenile offenders and adult offenders with children, and make other critical improvements in child protection.

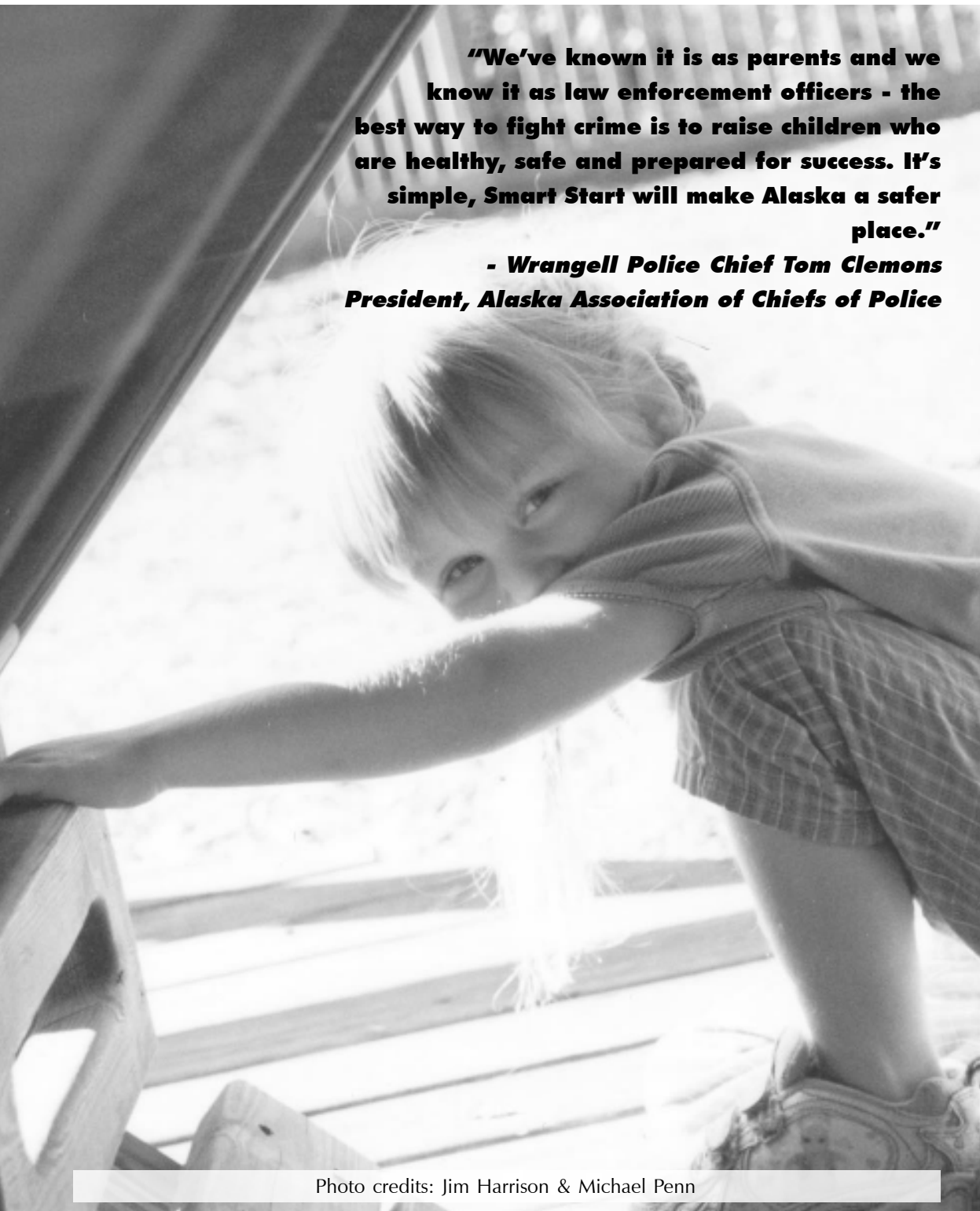
Ongoing Support - Replace temporary funds to continue the highly successful project that finds permanent homes for children lingering too long in foster care. Ensure more legal resources to help children and families in crisis.

Child Success

New Investments - \$600,000 to promote early literacy and to enroll more eligible children in Head Start, which prepares children and their families for success in school and in life.

Ongoing Support - Fully fund child care assistance for eligible working families. Support for school districts with growing enrollments. (The Knowles-Ulmer administration also has proposed a \$32.7 million investment next year for school excellence in Alaska.)

Innovative New Ideas - Improve the quality of child care and attract and retain the best child care workers by giving them an option to buy affordable health insurance (no cost to the state at this time).



"We've known it is as parents and we know it as law enforcement officers - the best way to fight crime is to raise children who are healthy, safe and prepared for success. It's simple, Smart Start will make Alaska a safer place."

**- Wrangell Police Chief Tom Clemons
President, Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police**

Photo credits: Jim Harrison & Michael Penn

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